

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANILA 09934 141204Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 09934

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF
SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROGRAM: POSSIBLE USE OF
PHILIPPINES AS TEMPORARY TRANSIT CENTER

REF: GENEVA 08721

1. UNHCR REP PHILIPPINES BLATTER TOLD CONSOFFS THIS MORN-
ING HE BELIEVED PROPOSED REFUGEE TRANSIT CENTER WOULD BE
FAVORABLY CONSIDERED BY GOP. BLATTER CONSIDERS PHILIPPINES
AS IDEAL LOCATION, BOTH GEOGRAPHICALLY AND BECAUSE OF AVAIL-
ABILITY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES,
TO ESTABLISH SUCH A CENTER. HE NOTED THAT MAJOR COUNTRIES
TAKING REFUGEES ALL HAVE IMMIGRATION REPRESENTATIVES IN
MANILA. HE ADDED THAT IN AN EARLIER DISCUSSION FONMIN
ROMULO STATED THAT GOP WOULD CONTINUE TO ACCEPT BOAT CASES
REGARDLESS OF AN INCREASE IN NUMBER. BLATTER AGREED THAT
GOP, IF RECEPTIVE TO PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH CENTER, WOULD
FIRST HAVE TO BE GUARANTEED THAT ONWARD RESETTLEMENT BE
ACCOMPLISHED WITH MINIMUM DELAY, NOT TO EXCEED THREE MONTHS
FOR ANY REFUGEE.

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PAGE 02 MANILA 09934 141204Z

2. IN EMBASSY'S OPINION, CONTINUED SUCCESS OF REFUGEE
PROGRAM IN PHILIPPINES DEPENDS MAINLY ON CONTINUATION OF
LOW PROFILE THE GOP HAS BEEN ABLE TO SHOW IN THE PAST. WE
BELIEVE GOP HAS IN LARGE BEEN ACCOMMODATING BECAUSE OF
RELATIVELY LOW NUMBER OF BOAT CASES ARRIVING HERE AND FACT
THAT REFUGEES PROCESSED AT JOSE FABELLA CAMP ARE MOVED OUT
QUICKLY, KEEPING CAMP POPULATION LOW. THIS HAS HELPED

AVOID PROBLEMS WITH NEIGHBORS, ESPECIALLY VIETNAM. GOP MAY BE LESS RESPONSIVE IF PRESENT DELICATE BALANCE IS CHANGED. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE, REFUGEE POPULATION IS NOW AT HIGHEST POINT (APPROX. 1100) SINCE 1975. GROWING CONCERN HERE IS PROBABLY REFLECTED IN CARTOON IN JUNE 3 DAILY EXPRESS, SHOWING GROUP LABELLED "VIETNAM REFUGEES" SEEKING TO ENTER "RP" HOME, WITH OCCUPANTS PEERING OUT APPREHENSIVELY. ADDITIONAL COMPLICATING FACTOR MAY BE RECENT CASES WHERE US NAVY SHIPS HEADED FOR NON-PHILIPPINE PORTS HAVE PICKED UP REFUGEES FROM BOATS ON HIGH SEAS AND TRANSFERRED THEM TO OTHER SHIPS COMING TO SUBIC BAY. THIS GIVES MISTAKEN IMPRESSION THAT US IS ACTIVELY SEEKING TO BRING REFUGEES TO PHILIPPINES.

3. IT IS DOUBTFUL GOP WILL AGREE TO SETTING UP A TRANSIT CENTER UNTIL U.S. HAS COME UP WITH A FIRM AND CONTINUING PROGRAM TO SETTLE REFUGEES IN U.S. ON SEEMINGLY PERMANENT BASIS. DEFINITELY, PROPOSAL FOR CENTER WOULD NOT PROSPER IF GOP THOUGHT IT WAS U.S. IDEA--UNHCR MUST PUSH IT ON ITS OWN. THIS MAY REQUIRE SOME EDUCATION HERE. DURING RECENT VISIT HERE OF USINS COMMISSIONER CASTILLO, PHIL IMMIGRATION CHIEF REYES EXPRESSED OPINION THAT REFUGEES LEAVING VIETNAM WERE INFLUENCED TO DO SO BY US 'PROPAGANDA' AND WERE ATTRACTED BY OUR BASES. OUR RECENT EXPERIENCE, CONFIRMED BY UNHCR, INDICATES THIS IS NO LONGER TRUE, BUT OLD IDEAS DIE HARD. MURPHY
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PAGE 03 MANILA 09934 141204Z

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